***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 7***

### ***Anne Says Her Prayers***

***Summary:***

* That night, Marilla instructs Anne on how to act at bedtime, i.e. fold her clothes and say her prayers.
* Anne tells Marilla that she never says her prayers. Marilla Cuthbert is, once again, surprised. Anne goes on to explain that she knows who God is but ever since Mrs. Thomas told her God made her hair red on purpose, she's been mad at him.
* Marilla tells Anne to thank God for her blessings and ask humbly for things she wants, so Anne asks God to let her stay at Green Gables and to make her good-looking when she grows up.
* She signs off "yours respectfully, Anne Shirley." Mic drop.
* Marilla tells Matthew later about the episode. She vows to get Anne a prayer book, and thinks about how her life has been easy until this point, but now her "time has come at last." (7.30)

***Synopsis:***

At bedtime, Marilla begins her program of moral and social education for Anne. She scolds Anne for leaving her clothes all over the floor the previous night and for failing to pray before bed. Anne replies that she has never said a prayer and does not know how to pray, though she would be happy to learn. Anne begins to ruminate on the language of prayer and religion. At the asylum, she was taught that God is “infinite, eternal, and unchangeable,” a description she thought grand. She explains that she rejected God because Mrs. Thomas told her God gave her red hair on purpose.

Despite her distaste for God, Anne wants to oblige Marilla. Marilla, horrified that a near-heathen is staying under her roof, begins to teach Anne the prayer “Now I lay me down to sleep,” but she senses that this prayer for innocent children is inappropriate for Anne, who has already had such a hard life. She lets Anne create her own prayer, and Anne improvises a flowery speech thanking God for such gifts as Bonny the geranium and the White Way of Delight, which is what she calls the main road of Avonlea. She prays for Green Gables to become her home, and to become pretty when she grows up. She ends the prayer by saying, “Yours respectfully, Anne Shirley.” Marilla resolves to send Anne to Sunday school as soon as she can make her some proper clothes.

***Critical Study:***

That night Marilla discovers that Anne does not know how to say her nightly prayers. As enchanted as the young girl is by words and poetry, Anne has as much enthusiasm for prayer as she does for her own red hair. A life of toil and hardship has little space for prayer in Anne's estimation. Obliging Marilla, Anne makes an earnest attempt at prayer, thankful for the Lake of Shining Waters and the White Way, asking to remain at Green Gables and to be good-looking when she is all grown up. Marilla is stricken by the youthful prayer, but reasons that it is ignorance and not wickedness that made the young girl pray so. In exasperation, Marilla deems Anne to be "next door to a perfect heathen," and sets to take Anne to Sunday school and begin her proper religious education.

Religion and moral virtue play a central role in the lives of the inhabitants of this fictionalized town of Avonlea. Anne has a longing to be good, if only to please, but in her is also a genuine ambition to embody the goodness and wholesomeness as exemplified by Marilla's rectitude and religious scrutiny. We are also reminded of a little girl's vanity and her suffering self-image in Anne's preoccupation with her red hair. Even Marilla feels slightly shamed by the girl's clothes and deems not to send her to Sunday school until she has clothes suitable to the occasion.

***Critical Analysis:***

At the end of the momentous day Marilla takes Anne up to her room, lectures her about picking up her clothes, and prepares to hear her prayers. She is horrified when Anne informs her she never prays: "People who have to look after twins can't be expected to say their prayers." Marilla, showing telltale signs of a sense of humor, realizes the conventional children's prayer will not do for Anne and tells her she's old enough to come up with her own prayer. Anne obligingly kneels by her bed and prays sincerely, if unconventionally, ending with "please let me stay at Green Gables; and please let me be good-looking when I grow up."

Marilla reminds herself Anne has had no religious instruction. She finds Matthew in the kitchen and announces Anne is "next door to a perfect heathen." It's going to take a lot of work bringing her religious education up to speed—but there's no turning back now.

Marilla firmly informs Matthew she'll take Anne to the manse the next day and borrow the Peep of the Day series. A bit of background: a manse is the house where a Presbyterian minister lives. It therefore follows Marilla is a Presbyterian. So is Mrs. Lynde, whose good works appear listed in [Chapter 1](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/chapter-1-summary/). As it will turn out, so are most of the main characters in the book. As readers will see, Anne becomes a devout Presbyterian but remains critical of certain aspects of Christianity.

Not surprisingly Anne's view of the divine is fresher and more original than Marilla's more conventional one. Anne resists the idea that praying can be done only while kneeling indoors. Why, she wonders, can't she go outside and "FEEL a prayer" instead of mouthing traditional platitudes? How can God have given her red hair on purpose?

Readers never find out how Anne feels about the Peep of the Day series, but it's a safe bet she wouldn't care for it. Written in the mid-19th century by the British wife of an evangelical minister, this tremendously popular series was billed as "the earliest religious instruction the infant mind is capable of receiving." Anne's mind is hardly infantile, and it seems likely she would reject the oversimplified text and strongly punitive tone of the books. One passage in the first lesson explains, "If a great box were to fall on your head, your head would be crushed. If you were to fall out of the window, your neck would be broken ... You see that you have a very weak little body. You should try not to hurt yourself, but God only can keep your body from all harm."

For Marilla the Peep of the Day books are an entirely proper way to give Anne some religious training. Still she can't bring herself to teach Anne the "now I lay me down to sleep" prayer. It's too primitive and simplistic for a girl like Anne. Already it is dawning on Marilla a girl with Anne's temperament and intelligence needs a more flexible approach.

***Significance:***

When it is time for Anne to go to bed, Marilla instructs Anne to say her prayers. Anne says that she never says prayers. Anne says that she knows about Christianity from the orphan asylum’s Sunday school, but she has never liked God because she believes God gave her red hair on purpose. Marilla tells Anne that she must say her prayers if she is going to stay at Green Gables. Anne says that she will say her prayers once she is in bed. Marilla tells Anne that she must say prayers kneeling next to her bed, which Anne feels is silly because she thinks it would be better to pray while looking at the beauty of nature.

Nevertheless, Anne gets down on her knees and makes up a prayer thanking God for the nature she has seen in Avonlea and asking to stay at Green Gables and to grow up to be good-looking. Marilla feels that the prayer is not proper but will do for the time being. As Marilla leaves, Anne calls her back and asks if it makes a difference that she forgot to end her prayer with “Amen” (p. 68). Marilla says that it won’t. When Marilla goes downstairs, she tells Matthew that it’s about time somebody adopted Anne and educated her. Marilla vows to enroll Anne in Sunday school as soon as she can sew her some appropriate clothing.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

That night in the east gable room, [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) tells [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) to say her prayers before going to sleep. When Anne explains that she never says her prayers, Marilla is horrified—doesn’t Anne know who God is? Anne replies that “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable,” as she learned in the asylum Sunday school. Somewhat relieved, Marilla says it’s nevertheless “wicked” to neglect one’s nightly prayers. Anne says it’s easier to be wicked with [red hair](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/symbols/red-hair)—and besides, she was once told that God gave her red hair on purpose, so she doesn’t think she should be expected to pray.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Anne quotes the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a document listing important Christian doctrines in question and answer format. Presbyterian children were often taught to memorize the Catechism. In Anne’s case, the Catechism answers are all she knows of religion; she doesn’t have a concept of relating to God more directly and personally. This is partly because she doesn’t believe a God who gave her red hair could be worth talking to.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) rejects this excuse, though teaching [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) to pray feels awkward. She tells Anne she must kneel down to pray, and Anne complies, though she doesn’t see the point—she’d rather go into a big field or the deep woods and simply “feel a prayer.” Marilla realizes that Anne hasn’t experienced human love, so she can’t be expected to understand God’s love. She finally tells Anne to just thank God for her blessings and ask for the things she wants. Anne obediently thanks God for things like the White Way of Delight and the Lake of Shining Waters. She also prays that she’ll be allowed to stay at Green Gables—and that God will make her good-looking someday. She closes the prayer, “Yours respectfully, Anne Shirley.” As Marilla leaves the room, Anne remembers that perhaps she should have said “Amen” instead.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Lacking conventional religious training, Anne doesn’t understand the point of traditions like kneeling to pray—it makes more sense to her that prayer is instinctively “felt” in a place where she experiences beauty and delight. Marilla realizes that Anne can’t be blamed for these beliefs; her human relationships have been so lacking that developing a relationship with God doesn’t make sense to her. Anne’s humorous prayer, sounding more like a polite letter than a devout prayer, is a good example of where she is in her religious development.

***Summary Part 3:***

Downstairs, [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) staunchly informs [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) that it’s time [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) was taught something—she’s practically a “heathen.” Tomorrow, she’s sending Anne to the minister for the Peep of Day series, and she’s getting Anne enrolled in Sunday school as soon as possible. It will be a lot of work, but Marilla figures life has been easy for her up to now, and she’ll just have to make the best of this new challenge.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The Peep of Day series was a highly popular series of religious education books by Favell Lee Mortimer, meant to prepare children to read the Bible for themselves. At 11, Anne would be considered too old for the simple lessons, showing how little religious teaching she’s received in her life.